CHAPTER 6

SYNTHESIS OF THE INQUIRY:

Children's voices enlightening further understanding of citizenship and citizenship education

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6.1 Introduction

In Chapter 6 I present a synthesis of the research project by reflecting on the significance and implications of the study as presented in Chapter 5. Through synthesis I offer my contribution to research in the domain of early childhood education. As a result of my findings, I relate my contribution to the unit of analysis, the concepts and theories studied and employed in this inquiry. When discussing my contribution, I refer to the perceived limitations of the study. In addition, I recommend new lines of inquiry associated with citizenship and citizenship education of the young child and indicate suggestions for theory, practice and policy. The chapter concludes with a review of the message of the nine-year-old learners as child citizens and the way forward for citizenship and citizenship education concerning the young child in the South African context.

6.2 Synoptic overview of the inquiry

My study focused on one case study as the unit of analysis: the nine-year-old learners of a primary school in an inner-city suburb in South Africa. In Chapter 4 I presented the nine-year-old participating learners' voices in order to understand how the nine-year-old learners, born in the first year of democracy, experience the democratic dispensation in South Africa as citizens. Insights gained from the learners' life experiences and understandings of the democratic dispensation as disclosed in Chapter 4, assisted in answering the subsequent research questions:

- How do learners perceive their democratic identities?

- How do learners understand their citizenship?

- How can the acquired understandings and identities extend generally held current conceptions of citizenship education?

The reason for this particular methodology in constructing the research questions is underpinned by research reports regarding citizenship and citizenship education, asserting that in order to find creative ways of supporting children's growing understanding and enactment of citizenship, it is necessary to proceed from children's experience of living (Smith, 2005:2; Sayer, 2005).

The exploratory nature of the research questions required a particular line of inquiry, which directed my research in the qualitative research domain as it entailed field research involving the young learners in and beyond the classroom situation. In order to understand what the field research entailed, I studied literature describing the complexities related to social research with young children (Morrow & Richards, 1996). Consequently, I adhered to ethical issues related to the young learners of my case study, especially related to my data collection methods and instruments since children are more vulnerable than adults in terms of ethical issues (Andrasik, Powers & McGrath, 2005). From the commencement of the study, I intended to present the voices of the young learners as they expressed themselves. I therefore used multiple and convergent instruments assisting the data collection process to ensure valid and reliable data for heightening inferences (Cole, Martin & Dennis, 2004). I outlined this mainly qualitative methodology, the justification thereof and the description of the various instruments used for data collection in Chapter 3.

In Chapter 1, I constructed the rationale explaining that, apart from my personal interest in citizenship education related to young learners, I presented their voice as marginalized group of citizens within the South African population, a voice not often heard in research publications (Osler & Starkey, 2005b). The voices of the nine-year-old learners were studied against the background of issues related to citizenship and citizenship education in the South African context. I could only find evidence of a few empirical studies related to the South African context concerning citizenship and citizenship education concerning young children. The lack of empirical research signified a void in the research domain concerning citizenship issues and the young child, especially in the South African context. It also illuminates the rationale of this study in the sense that children are important stakeholders in education and the democratic society, yet are rarely given opportunities to

contribute. In order to locate citizenship education in South Africa and its characteristics within the international context, I offered an historical overview of citizenship education as it was understood and practiced in different ways over the centuries. The information gained through this overview highlighted the fact that citizenship education is a contested issue in most democracies and the overview guided me to undertake a study into current issues related to citizenship education in established and 'new' democracies, like South Africa. This information shed light on the issues related to citizenship education in contemporary South Africa. I presented various perspectives on citizenship and citizenship education (Crick in Department for Education and Employment, 1998; Osler, 2005; Mellor *et al.,* 2002; Kymlicka, 2004) in order to understand the contextualisation of these concepts in the South African milieu to enable me to understand the voices of the participating learners of my case study.

Given this theoretical background to citizenship education, I focused on citizenship education and young children by describing the international and the local focus. On international level, education for citizenship associated with young children is acknowledged as crucial for the maintenance of the skills, understandings and knowledge presupposed in the democratic structures of society. According to my interpretation, citizenship education on local level is perceived as a priority to enhance nation-building through advocating the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), especially commencing with the very young child (Ministry of Education, 2001). I consulted numerous sources to enlighten the political and social circumstances influencing citizenship education in contemporary South Africa in Chapter 2. This was done in an attempt to come to a more complex understanding of the learners' experiences as citizens against the background of the democratic dispensation of South Africa, which informed me regarding the learners' understandings of their citizenship and their democratic identity.

In Chapter 2, I also reviewed empirical studies focused on citizenship education. The results of this endeavour revealed research studies on citizenship education in general and mostly focused on the theoretical aspects thereof such as what constitutes the knowledge base of citizenship education, the skills necessary to act as an active and participative citizen and the values fundamental to citizenship education. However, only a few studies focused on aspects of citizenship related to the young child. One such study was the IEA internationally conducted research project, which focused on the experiences of fourteen-year-old children as citizens with the main focus on how they gained civic knowledge and attitudes (Mellor *et al.*, 2002:12). Although I found the results of this study

informative and useful, the age group differed from that of my unit of analysis and therefore the methodology applied in the IEA study was not applicable to the nine-year-old learners of my case. The limitation from this study and other existing studies indicated that no standardized instrumentation existed for exploring young children's understandings of citizenship, which motivated me in designing creative instruments in collecting data revealing the learners' unique voices, in the process minimalizing the chance that learners could copy my or any other adult's presumed ideas.

From the literature review it was evident that diverse theories, related to core concepts focused on the young child as well as theories related to citizenship and the facilitation of citizenship, were applicable to the life experiences of the learners as citizens. The theory of postcolonialism (Viruru, 2005) and the theory of transforming society as described by Mac Naughton (2003) and Freire (2005) proved to be most relevant for my research project. These theories assisted me in analyzing the data and understanding the constructions of the participating learners' life experiences as citizens and how they perceived their democratic identities. The theories also helped me in understanding issues about educating young learners for citizenship in contemporary South Africa. Having given this background I then presented a conceptual framework (see Figure 2.2 of Chapter 2) to illuminate all relevant concepts and the relationships between them.

An account of my data collection process commenced in Chapter 3 with a description of two pilot studies in which I interviewed nine-year-old children. The two studies informed me about the ability of the participants to answer questions on the notion of citizenship, as well as on possible instruments I could use. The pilot studies furthermore indicated that there could be no single explanatory factor influencing children's understandings of citizenship and the developing of a democratic identity, and that I needed many participants to get a reliable indication of their perceptions of citizenship. Therefore, I chose the nine-year-old learners of an inner-city school as the unit of analysis as the school reflected the diverse population of South Africa. Furthermore, I decided to use various data collection methods to ensure validity and reliability of the data through triangulation.

With the help of a co-researcher, I then implemented multiple instruments to assist data collection with the aim of accumulate learners' voices about their life experiences as citizens. Some of the instruments were designed in advance, but others were developed while discussing citizenship

issues with the learners through open-ended questions and probes during interview sessions. This recursive nature of data collection, as influenced by the interpretive paradigm, proved to reveal an abundance of valuable data, which informed the research questions. An additional source of rich data was the drawings made by learners when participating in the instruments. The focus group interviews conducted with five learners from one class proved fruitful in revealing rich data and when analyzing this set of data, I realized that it verified data from the group interviews.

As an interpretivist, I had no definitive assumptions of the experiences of the nine-year-old learners as citizens living in democratic South Africa, except the experiences I gained from the pilot studies, and information I gleaned from the literature on citizenship related to young children, especially the information on the envisaged learner in the South African context (Department of Education, 2002c). Tentative underlying assumptions were that nine-year-old learners do have a voice about the political world in which they live. Another assumption I cautiously deliberated was that the political community and its everyday practices of discourse and communication provide a context for the developing civic consciousness of learners to transform reality towards action for social justice and equity in a democracy. These assumptions are aligned with postcolonial theorists who found that seven- to nine-year-old children could engage in deeper levels of meaning (Tobin in Viruru, 2005; Mac Naughton, 2005) such as the notion of citizenship. Evidence to support the postcolonial theory comes from Holden (2000), who states that young children are normally interested in 'big' issues and desire social justice. John (2000) argues that young children can play a role in shaping societies in which they live, especially in working towards equity and social justice. The learners' expressions about bringing change to a better and safer environment, correlates to the transforming position on early childhood education (Mac Naughton, 2003). The theories guided me in constructing the data collection instruments as well as my interpretation of the data. I learned that children construct their own understandings of their social world and that children can and want to make a contribution to a more democratic society.

Therefore, I executed an inductive data analysis in Chapter 4 and applied constructivist grounded theory analysis. The application of the constructivist grounded theory analysis revealed the Citizen Context Diagram (see **Addendum 11**) representing four themes and relevant categories. Each of the themes was explored and interpreted in my attempt to understand the learners' experiences as citizens in the democratic dispensation of South Africa. This interpretation revealed not only what the learners experienced as citizens but also how they gained experiences and understandings about

citizenship. When interpreting the learners' expressions on each theme I related my interpretations to the South African context and the intention of citizenship education as an integrated component of the national curriculum (Department of Education, 2002c). Although the four themes from the data were discussed as separate entities, their interrelatedness offered further illumination of the learners' expressions about their experiences as citizens of democratic South Africa.

In Chapter 5, I provided the significance of my findings, which I accumulated inductively and deductively from the learners' life experiences as citizens of the democratic dispensation of South Africa. My findings culminated in my insight into the learners' perceptions of their democratic identity and understandings of their citizenship. As a further implication of the findings of the inquiry, I extended my personal and hopefully others' current conceptions of citizenship education. When discussing the various findings I distinguished the implications of the findings for theory, policy and curriculum.

As component of Chapter 6, I gave this synoptic overview of my inquiry where I elaborated on my research endeavours described in each chapter of my research project. I also offered my contributions and recommendations for enhancing citizenship education related to the participating learners of my case study, to policy and curriculum issues. In addition, I acknowledged constraints pertinent to this study. I suggested ideas for further research concerning voids that emerged from the data: children's construction of their understandings of citizenship in different contexts of South Africa, the role of the teacher and the facilitation of citizenship at school, including the content of textbooks and policy issues regarding citizenship and citizenship education. Chapter 6 concludes with an epilogue where I expressed my final insights and understandings of the participating learner's life experiences as child citizens of the democratic dispensation of South Africa. Finally, the inquiry has not 'uncovered ultimate truth' (Seale, 1999; Cohen *et al.*, 2000:3), but has provided an enhanced understanding of the life world of the nine-year-old learners of my case as citizens of the democratic dispensation of South Africa.

6.3   Contribution of the inquiry

In this section I present the contribution of this study based on the presentation of the significance and implications of the inquiry as offered in Chapter 5. In addition, I discuss my contribution related to the existing perceptions of childhood. In my attempt to understand the experiences of the

nine-year-old learners of the democratic dispensation of South Africa as citizens, I expressed my views on researching young children and early childhood. I positioned my stance with that of the postcolonial theory (Viruru, 2005). This theory is situated within the new sociology of childhood and has to be studied in contrast to the developmentalism of the nineteenth century (Farrell, 2005:4-6). Farrell (2005) states that within the developmental frame, the child was seen as an incomplete version of the adult and, by virtue of the child's developmental level, was often short of the requisite capacity, for example to consent to participation in research and in the ability of self-expression. Against this background, I saw the nine-year-old learners as competent participants in their everyday worlds and capable of participation in or withdrawal from research. In addition, I perceived the learners as child-citizens and not subjects in the democratic dispensation. As a result of my perspective the learners expressed experiences and understandings about abstract concepts, for example citizenship and democracy and morality, exceeding the levels promoted by developmentalists. This research position allowed the learners to express their views of a political nature not often revealed as research results although stated as their right in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) as 'children's rights to express their views on all matters that affect them'.

This study may be especially relevant in the South African context as there is limited research available, a fact already reported on in Chapter 2. The study has contributed to the knowledge base of citizenship in the sense that I employed the liberal conception of citizenship (rights and responsibilities of a citizen) as well as the communitarian concept of citizenship (the practice of citizenship through active participation, extended to compassion and imaginative action). In addition I used the idea that citizenship has to encompass feelings of belonging and democratic values in a balanced way. This study substantiates the balance Kennedy and Mellor (2005:53) report between a 'democracy of the mind' (understanding basic democratic processes) and a 'democracy of the heart' (values) because values that are not underpinned by knowledge would not sustain child citizens when those values are under attack. From the expressions of the learners of my case study, it seems that they identified with the democratic South Africa and are committed to the democratic values; however, they revealed limited knowledge about democratic processes. Therefore, I propose that the ideal of nation-building be balanced with the ideal of equipping learners with the needed knowledge and skills to participate in democratic processes to sustain and defend the democracy by identifying and acting on potential threats to the South African democracy.

Concerning citizenship education, this study confirms the theories of Dewey and Alexander, who argue for citizenship education through a school that is a living example of active citizenship with an ethos of responsible participation by teachers and parents. That ethos, in return, can best thrive in a society that promotes such schools, schools that are democratic in policy and practice. Apart from my findings that citizenship is integrated in the national curriculum (Department of Education, 2002c) I did not research the roles of the teachers, parents and policy makers in the construction of the learners' citizenship. This brings me to reflect on the possible constraints as described in Chapter 1 of this study and the identification of the main limitation of this study. I felt the need to understand the teachers' point of view, the parents' interests and beliefs and the ideology of policy makers to come to an inclusive understanding of my research focus. Since I chose a case study and understanding was my primary mode of inquiry, I actually gained insights beyond imagination.

An additional contribution of this study might be regarding the data collection methodology and the data analysis process. Researchers in the field of early childhood education might find the instruments I employed to mediate self-expression of the learners, of value. The employment of the constructivist grounded theory analysis may help researchers when working with texts like drawings, sentences, slogans and letters. The Hot chair drama technique may also assist researchers in obtaining authentic data from young children, especially on researching abstract concepts.

Finally, this study contributes to enhancing the construction of citizenship in the context of the nine-year-old participating learners of my case study; related to theory and content. The following recommendations are given as guidelines:

- Secure the safety of the learners, as safety is their inalienable right according to the Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996).

- Ensure that they experience in their everyday life the practical implementation of democratic values such as social justice and equity, equality, ubuntu, non-racism, the rule of law and respect as articulated by the Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996) and promoted by the Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy (Ministry of Education, 2001). Learners also have to experience political leaders who are accountable and adhere to the democratic values. If this does not happen the young learners of my case study may lose faith in

everything democracy stands for and they may become apathetic towards democracy, its institutions and its processes.

- Acknowledge the young learners as an 'ever-present segment' (Cohen, 2005:221) of the South African population and not only as 'future adults', as Alparone (2001) suggests. Include them as participants in the democratic processes at school level by investigating Dewey's theory of building a learning community (in Mac Naughton & Williams, 2004:225-238) and Alexander's (2002) citizenship schools where learners can construct in a holistic, cross-disciplinary way (Mac Naughton, 2003:40-52) the status, feeling and practices as components of citizenship (Osler, 2005:12-13). Alexander (2002) described a citizenship school, which is based on the new British curriculum, revised with a complete focus on citizenship, as the National Curriculum for Citizenship.

- Enhance participation or engagement related to citizenship in the school, such as voting for peer representatives (Davies, 2005) developed a model on a Youth Parliament for South Africa. Learners could vote after an information session and making an informed decision. This procedure may assist them in experiencing the consequences of making choices. If the learners have the opportunity to participate in a school project focused on delivering support for people in need, their participation and socialisation skills may be enhanced. The implementation of democratic processes at school level could help the learners to realize the benefits of being engaged in democratic processes (Kennedy & Mellor, 2005:53) and contextualise citizenship education, a point of criticism for Moodley and Adam (2004:172).

- Teachers need to contextualise citizenship by acknowledging that their learners are members of the postmodern era and need to be treated accordingly. They must be sensitive to the experiences of their learners, regarding their civic context. They need to know what the issues in society are that influence the lives of their learners and their understanding of their citizenship and align their content accordingly (Holden & Clough, 2000).

- The content learners need to know, entails the major concepts underpinning democratic governance, democratic processes, the composition and dimensions of the South African society (both past and present) and the challenges facing contemporary South Africa in a globalized world. Kennedy and Mellor (2005:53) argue for a sound knowledge base and

understanding. The introduction of global citizenship may ensure a broader vision and understanding of citizenship and a perception of South Africa's position in Africa and in the rest of the world.

- Allow for diverse ways of knowing and thinking as the postcolonial theorists promote, and do not underestimate the young learners' capabilities for engaging in deeper levels of understanding. Learners have to be exposed to skills needed to be a critical, active participant by using content that is contextualised and raises issues of social justice and equity. Interpretive skills will assist learners in understanding the world around them, responding to it and feeling empowered to influence it. The results of this study suggest that the nine-year-old learners feel disempowered and therefore need to be exposed to dialogue and to explore the world in different ways. Learners need, for example, to experience the skill of discourse, the skill of criticizing a process or a system constructively. Learners need to be involved in debating 'real life' problems concerning them, thus problems or issues relevant to their specific context, like the street children, poverty and crime, which the learners experience every day. Embrace the learners' desire to contribute to change and see this as an opportunity to facilitate the necessary values, attitudes, knowledge and skills they need to engage in change. Take cognizance of the transforming society theory that promotes the belief that educators and children can work together to create a better world. In relation to this research, this could imply a citizenry that is willing and capable to sustain and defend the democracy.

6.4   Recommendations for further research

As a result, my study revealed opinions and information expressed by the learners on their experiences as citizens in the democratic dispensation of South Africa, which may be noteworthy for further research by policy makers in the political and educational arena. Four areas of citizenship and citizenship education, which emerged from the data as fundamental challenges for the future, need to be explored. Firstly, continuing research as to how other nine-year-old learners in different contexts of South Africa experience the democratic dispensation of South Africa. A comparative perspective may bring new light to the understandings of citizenship of young children and dimensions that influence their understandings of citizenship. Secondly, the role of teachers as civic educators has to be studied and thirdly researchers need to look at the facilitation of

citizenship education, including the content, the foundational underpinnings (theory and concepts) and the teaching methods, beyond what is prescribed by the National Curriculum Statement (Department of Education, 2002c). Fourthly, research needs to scrutinize policy issues and the agenda policy makers have regarding citizenship and citizenship education in South Africa. I made suggestions for future research throughout the research project but provide suggestions as critical questions, grouped according to the following themes:

Theme 1: Young learners' construction of citizenship in a variety of contexts

- How would nine-year-old learners in different contexts of South Africa perceive citizenship and democratic identity? What would a true South African citizenship look like?
- Could there be common factors influencing the construction of citizenship?
- In a diverse cultural society, what are the core values a learner (as a citizen) must hold that would sustain a democracy?
- How could participation be made more authentic for learners in exercising democratic skills?
- How do young learners construct their moral consciousness?
- How could parents contribute to the citizenship of their children in a democracy and specifically in the South African democracy?

Theme 2: Teachers as civic educators

- What are the possible understandings of teachers concerning citizenship?
- What are the possible understandings of teachers about the characteristics needed to be a role model for young child citizens?
- What could possible content to educate teachers in citizenship education be?
- What can South African training institutions learn from other nation-states regarding the training of teachers for citizenship education?

Theme 3: Citizenship education

- What is the knowledge base necessary for young learners to engage in citizenship and understand democracy?

- What possible teaching strategies and techniques could be implemented to enhance learners' experiences of democratic practices?

- What possible teaching approaches could enhance learners' mastery of the necessary skills like participation, to act responsibly as citizens in sustaining democracy?

- How could the teaching of critical thinking and problem solving related to citizenship in a diverse democracy be enhanced?

- How could the national curriculum accommodate social cohesion, inclusion and trust, as these are the constructs related to democracies with diverse cultural populations?

Theme 4: Policy regarding citizenship and citizenship education

- What possible threats to the South African democracy can be identified? This could inform educational policy to guide citizenship education.

- How could policy ensure a comprehensive citizenship for young children, receptive to their special political circumstances?

6.5   Epilogue

In this chapter, I presented my interpretation of the findings representing the key concepts and theories of the life experiences and understandings of the nine-year-participating learners of my case study as citizens in a democratic South Africa. My interpretation of their experiences guided me to findings about their understandings of their citizenship and their democratic identity. My inquiry is consequently based on the interpretation of the learners' expressions, aligned to my epistemological perspective, which declares that this inquiry revealed understandings of a reality as only one of the many realities on citizenship education and the young child. As an interpretivist, I acknowledge the complexity of doing research with young children as well as the complexity of citizenship and citizenship education. I admit the multiplicity of causal factors influencing being a young citizen in a democracy.

I explored the voices of young learners not often explored in research projects of a political nature on national and international level. The nine-year-old learners stated that they were not listened to and that they had no report on any participatory system in decision-making at school or at community level. However, they articulated their expectations for a future South Africa and what

their role as citizens could be to inspire change. John (2000:46) describes children as a marginalized group, yet significant actors in the shaping and creation of societies in which they live. Mellor *et al.* (2002:136) believe that young people are our most precious resource and that we need to take notice of how they experience and respond to situations in their life world. They are not passive recipients of knowledge but have well developed ideas, which adults most of the time do not expect of them. Holden (2000) adds to this argument by reasoning that before teaching young children about citizenship, we have to understand their life experiences.

The nine-year-old learners' life experiences as citizens as well as our understandings about citizenship education have to be explored in the context of contemporary South Africa. The South African democracy was founded in 1994 and this historical event brought South Africans together in hope for a common destiny. The establishment of the new and negotiated democracy was looked upon nationally and internationally as an example of 'the global benchmark for dialogue, for crafting a condition of freedom and equality from a conflict that seemed fatally irreconcilable' (Ministry of Education, 2001:9). Since then much has happened in all spheres of the South African society and after twelve years of democracy we as South Africans have to ask ourselves how are we going to sustain the 'still fragile' democracy as described in the Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy (Ministry of Education, 2001:6).

South Africa has a new challenge to confront, a challenge for a unity of purpose, creating bonds where before there were fractures and easing the tensions of past conflicts. One way of confronting the new challenge is, as Jeffreys (2006) puts it: 'we as South Africans have to say *never again* [referring to the apartheid era] and move on in sustaining the democracy for future generations with a spirit of determination, humility and forgiveness'. Another way of confronting the new challenge is what Jansen (2006) describes as 'a critical voice coming from all sections of the diverse South African population against events that hold a threat to the democracy' and what he calls 'populism based on race that threatens the South African democracy'. The threat of populist pressure to democracy is not unique to South Africa. Linton (2001) refers to the hindrance of populist pressure on the public accountability of government in Britain. If South Africa wishes to be a unique and exceptional example of an African democracy, values such as the promotion of its people have to be elevated above corruption, propaganda and oppression. According to Jansen we as South Africans have to define the character of our democracy and accordingly our future.

Against this background and the time frame of contemporary South Africa, I explored the findings of the data. Learners' expressions revealed their consciousness of the context in which they were living. One learner commenced her letter to Madiba with: 'Dear Mister Mandela, I was born in 1994, when you were released from jail'. When this study commenced, civic or citizenship education had just been introduced through a new revision of a transformational curriculum. Consequently, being nine years of age, the participating learners had been exposed to this curriculum for two years. However, I acknowledge that they would have gained the full effect of the civic education initiative at a later stage of their school career. Regardless of their age, the nine-year-old learners expressed ideas about the abstract concepts related to democracy and citizenship that exceeded my expectations, based on personal experience and literature on young children and their abilities.

The Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996) expresses the nation's social values and its expectations of the roles, rights and responsibilities of a citizen in democratic South Africa. The national curriculum was based on the innovative and negotiated Constitution. The Bill of Rights, included in the Constitution, places paramount value on equality, human dignity, life, and freedom and security of persons. These and other rights to freedom of religion, belief, and expression, exist side-by-side with socio-economic rights, which can be related to the right of each person to freedom from poverty, homelessness, poor health and hunger. Through teaching and learning a vision was promoted for: 'A prosperous, truly united, democratic and internationally competitive country with literate, creative and critical citizens leading productive, self-fulfilled lives in a country free of violence, discrimination and prejudice' (Republic of South Africa, 1996).

The national curriculum (Department of Education, 2002c) describes the expectations for the future South African citizens: the expected citizen, who will be able to enhance the democracy aligned with other researchers in the field of citizenship and citizenship education who writes about the what, why and how of citizenship and citizenship education related to the young child (De Melendez, Beck & Fletcher, 2000; Savage & Armstrong, 2004). To theorize about the future citizen and how this citizen should cope with the social and political realities of a nation-state and live the core values on which just and peaceful democratic societies are built, is the straightforward component of citizenship. However, when it comes to the implementation of citizenship, especially concerning the young child, citizenship becomes a contested concept and education for citizenship becomes a potential site for debate and controversy. Supplementary to the problem of theory and

practice, learners themselves have a voice concerning citizenship. The nine-year-old participating learners of my case study revealed themselves as the active and responsible citizen. However, the learners expressed their participation in the democratic dispensation of South Africa only in an imaginative way and as a future vision. Irrespective of the learners' commitment to democracy and their desire to participate in ensuring a sustainable future life in the South African democracy, they were seemingly excluded from the current democratic processes.

There seems to be a contradiction in what the infused human rights, social justice and conceptions of democratic citizenship aimed to do in an attempt to prepare the youth for active and responsible citizenship. In reality the reported experiences of the democratic dispensation reported on by the participating learners of my case study that contradicts the founding principle of the Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996), which is common citizenship and the equal enjoyment of a range of citizen rights. Vally (2005:31) already reported the discrepancy between the existing normative framework of the South African society and the promise of a democratic citizenship and the actual realization of this promise.

During the time of curriculum reform the Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy (Ministry of Education, 2001) was published, promoting ten democratic values, also called social values, foundational to the Constitution as guidelines for citizenship education. The national curriculum (Department of Education, 2002c) introduced citizenship education, not as a separate subject, but as an integrated component of the curriculum. The national curriculum (Department of Education, 2002c:4, 6) 'aims to develop the full potential of each learner as a citizen of a democratic South Africa. It seeks to create a lifelong learner who is confident and independent, literate, numerate, and multi-skilled, compassionate, with a respect for the environment and the ability to participate in society as a critical and active citizen'. The curriculum further attempts to uphold a democratic vision of the society and the citizens that should emerge from the school system should be able to 'participate as responsible citizens in the life of local, national and global communities' (Department of Education, 2002c).

The nine-year-old learners revealed through their life experiences of the democratic dispensation of South Africa as citizens, very positive attitudes towards South Africa and towards life in general, in contrast with what their local neighbourhood offered them. At the age of nine, they revealed most of the attributes of the envisaged learner as described by the national curriculum. They expressed

notions of national belonging and a democratic identity as well as a moral and ethical character. The learners revealed a perception of community of all South Africans bounded and loyal to the Constitution and the democratic values underpinning the Constitution (1996). The learners' vision of a 'new' South Africa, where each citizen with his/her individual, local identity will form a common South African community, is a vision all people in South Africa can share. However, the learners expressed their inability to participate in the democratic dispensation of South Africa as a result of marginalization. They wanted to be active participants in bringing social change on the local and national levels of the South African democracy.

To participate in securing their future will empower the nine-year-old learners of my case study for they have future expectations, as articulated by a learner: 'I believe that we as the youth can make a difference in the future…' (P1 – Class 3 – Focus group interviews). Additional to participation, the learners also need to be exposed to 'sophisticated and critical thinking skills' (Savage & Armstrong, 2004). The learners of my case study have revealed the capacity to engage with abstract concepts; and the enhancement of higher-order cognitive skills will assist them in understanding the world around them and their roles as citizens in an increasingly interdependent and diverse world. These skills will assist them in approaching challenging problems from multiple perspectives and in mastering basic principles that can be applied to situations well beyond the context in which they are educated.

The preparation of South African citizens, especially the young learners, is a priority for the future. Regarding the implementation of citizenship education in the South African context, a continued debate is needed about what kind of democracy we want for the future and the related values, knowledge and skills that will be needed by young citizens to understand democracy in order to sustain it. Not only are deliberations necessary regarding understanding and sustaining the democracy but also the education of the future citizens to identify threats to democracy and how to defend it. There have been promising beginnings on citizenship education in South Africa during the earlier years of the implementation of the national curriculum (Department of Education, 2002c) but much remains to be done. This study contributes to the growing indigenous knowledge base in this field.